

Most of the nests contained one egg, while two nests contained two eggs each. The eggs were creamy, stone coloured with deep brown blotches. The minimum distance between two nests was 0.43 m. A male and female were seen in courtship display. They caught each other by the bill and the male walked twice in a semi-circle in front of the female.

Three hundred Large Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* were seen on the southern side on bare rock. Seventeen eggs were seen on bare rock and two on open ground in shallow scrapes. The creamy white eggs, blotched with deep brown and brownish scrawls at the broad end, and bigger than that of *Sterna anaethetus*, were being incubated.

Five Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* were seen in a flock of Large Crested Terns. One pair of Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* were seen on the rock in courtship display. At 1900 hrs, 150 Roseate Terns in scattered flocks arrived from the old lighthouse and gathered on the western side of

the rock for rest. The small, noisy flocks kept flying and landing for 30 minutes.

A Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* was also seen feeding amongst a group of Large Crested Terns. In the evening, 400 Blue Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* landed in small flocks. One White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* was also seen sailing over the island.

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15. COMMON HOPOE (*UPUPA EPOPS*) FEEDING ON PRINIA (*PRINIA* SP.) CORPSE

On October 22, 2001, while traveling from Shahada to Ranipur, Nandurbar district, Maharashtra, at about 1400 hrs, I observed a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) on the metalled road. As we passed by, I noticed that it was feeding on a Prinia (*Prinia* sp.) that was probably hit by a vehicle. Its belly was open and the intestines were hanging out; one eye too was hanging out of the socket.

As we approached, the hoopoe flew to a nearby tree. I took the Prinia with me for identification. As I returned to the vehicle, the Common Hoopoe came back and started picking up the scraps of meat on the road.

According to Ali and Ripley (1983), the Common Hoopoe is strictly an insectivorous bird. However, it has been reported feeding on lizards, frogs and toads, and exceptionally on birds' eggs (Cramp 1985), but I could not find any reference to a Common Hoopoe feeding on a bird carcass. This could be an opportunistic meal.

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16. INDIAN PITTA *PITTA BRACHYURA* IN THE THAR DESERT

Balsamand Lake lies at the foot of the low hills north of Jodhpur (25° 6'-27° 1' E to 71° 9'-74° 1' N). It commands a view of a garden on the slopes still owned by the erstwhile Maharaja of Jodhpur. I was given the opportunity of studying the fauna of this ancient lake constructed in 1159 AD. A dam was constructed here in 1873 to 1895 by Maharaja Jaswant

Singhji II. There are a number of large trees of *Ficus benghalensis*, *F. religiosa*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Syzygium cumini*, *Mangifera indica*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Salvadora oleoides* and *Dalbergia latifolia*.

The first thing I saw was hundreds of fruit bats *Pteropus giganteus* clinging to a group of Banyan trees on the overflow